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MARK MATRIX MULTIPLE = PRINT

Personal notes and embedded bibliography

These notes expand on the fundamental attributes of printmaking — the mark, the matrix, and the multiple – and form the basis for the ontology and ethos of the discipline.

THE MARK

Printmaking is a unique mark, a mark with beauty and depth, a mark with technical and metaphorical implications that distinguishes it from any other mark. It allows a unique expression through its imprint in union with the paper, and finds its voice through the individual artist.

- VOICE. Each kind of printed mark has its own voice, has meaning that emerges from its formal qualities and its production.
(Thomas McEvilley, *On the Manner of Addressing Clouds, Art & Discontent*)

- TRACE. Having to do with the surface, leaving a trace.

It's indexical - like a fingerprint, it leaves a mark that refers to its maker and the way it was made.

(Charles Pierce, *Icons, indices, and symbols.*)

“The third stage of the argument: If all physical contact calls to mind the act that establishes it (in an indexical relationship), every act calls forth as well, and imperatively, the proper name of the actor...”

(Georges Didi-Huberman and Thomas Repensek, *The Index of the Absent Wound - Monograph on a Stain*, October, Vol. 29, pp. 63-81)

- IMPRINT. A deep mark - it has depth. The mark represents a union, an embedding. In a literal sense, this embedding is with paper, traditionally, but in general it is an embedding with the “receiving surface.”
(José Roca, *Prints, or Contemporary Art?, Philagrafika.*)
- IMPRESSION. It marks us, sometimes it bites us (mordant etch and satirical scratch).
- SUBLATION. Hegel's idea of Aufhebung or sublation - contradictory implications of both preserving and changing, the lifting of something, literally and figuratively from a lower place to a higher place, or to save or store something, or to lift as in remove. The mark goes through a dialectical transformation from plate to print.

- CHANCE. 'Giving up visual control', marks, in conjunction with the artists' giving up of control when collaborating with the process and the press. Incidental marks (remarks). The happy accident.
- HISTORY. Historical marks and records – the printed mark records history, literally, it leaves a mark.
([William Kentridge Prints](#), by Susan Stewart, published by David Krut Projects.)
- MORTALITY: we scratch on the lid of the coffin, we make a mortal mark on the world.
- SCAR. William Kentridge, speaking on etching and drypoint, he said, the mark is a scar. And so he implied, the matrix is the body.
- ECHO. The mark is an echo of the original or the source - loss of aura, gain of resonance.
(Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.)
- HAPTIC and OPTIC. The printed mark engages both touch and sight.
(*The Attraction of Print – Notes on the Surface of the Art Print*, by Ruth Pelzer-Montada.)
- VISCERALITY and ENERVATION- "Viscerality is understood as the emphasis on the materiality of the artistic surface while enervation describes its opposite, represented by the preponderance, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, of images on screens or screen-like images."
(Terry Smith, *Impossible presence: surface and screen in the photogenic era, Introduction – Viscerality, Enervation, the fate of the image in modernity*.)

THE MATRIX

- TRANSFERENCE. The matrix is a mirroring- our Narcissus, artists fall in love with their plates.
- REVERSAL. The matrix is backwards from the print, or vice versa.
- A MIRROR and a LAMP. The matrix reflects back the image and also shines new light on the original drawing.
(M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*.)
- SYSTEM. The matrix is a system, that which is dependable and yet malleable in our hands, fixed but ever changeable matrix.
(Charles Cohan *The Net of Irrationality: The Variant Matrix and the Tyranny of the Edition*, *Contemporary Impressions*, Volume 1, Number 2, Fall 1993, pp. 9-11.)
- WOMB. A situation or set of circumstances that allows or encourages the origin, development, or growth of something.

- HYPOTHESIS. The matrix is the hypothesis, proposition, major premise in building a syllogism (a logical 3 part argument) – William Kentridge. The process of printing and going through the press to gathering data or the minor premise, and the resulting impression to the “proof” or conclusion. Kentridge describes the intermediate process of printing the plate as the moment of truth when the idea is tested “and the hope is that you are convinced by the proof of the rightness of the first proposition.”
(Sara Kirk Hanley, *Thinking Aloud, Ink -Art 21 Blog.*) (Also see original source, [Trace](#), by Judith Hecker, published by MOMA.)

THE MULTIPLE

- EDITION. The print multiple is an “ exactly repeatable pictorial statement.”
(William M Ivins, [Prints and Visual Communication](#))
- MULTIPLICITY. The multiple begets multiplicity. Calvino uses an encyclopedia as an emblem for Multiplicity.
(Italo Calvino, [Six Memos for the Next Millenium](#), memo on Multiplicity)

Xu Bing thinks of multiplicity aesthetically - “When I speak of “multiplicity,” it is not in the commonly understood sense of the word: a technical aspect of the printmaking process, as this characteristic is present in all life’s products that make intermediary use of a given medium (e.g. replicas, processed photos, etc.). I am instead focused on the aesthetic sense of “multiplicity” as it exists in art. It is something few people take heed of even today, but is in reality an unexplored domain of the medium’s essence.”

(Xu Bing, [A New Exploration and Reconsideration of Pictorial Multiplicity](#))

- DEMOCRACY. The print multiple is a metaphor for freedom, however idiosyncratic that freedom may be. (This is a paraphrase from Ellen Gallagher’s artist talk, 2003.)
- ACCESSIBILITY. The multiple makes cultural and political change possible through education and propaganda.
(See [Beauty is in the Street: the power of protest posters](#), Four Corners Books, 2011)
- GUTENBERG → GOOGLE
“Print provides the means to bypass the economic and critical hierarchy of the gallery-museum nexus. Print goes beyond the private artist language to speak to a broad audience and to function in daily life. It allows artists to cross the boundaries between art and life, aggressively seeking out new audiences. Beyond the museum wall, print is the mechanism for producing multiples that reach out into the community. In this form, print functions as a democratic, direct, and modest means of communication, breaking down arts function as a capitalist object.”
(Hugh Merrill, [Post Print: Staking Claim to the Territory](#), Contemporary Impressions)
- REPETITION. “Literal repetition” initiates a rupture in the continuity of life, and works toward immortality. It is key to spiritual practice, meditative.
(Boris Groys, [Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction](#), eflux journal)

Mark Matrix Multiple
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- ANTI MONUMENT. As a product disseminated in the public sphere, the multiple works against bourgeois sites of pilgrimage.
(Seth Price, *Dispersion*, 2008, pdf)
- WITNESS. (multiple witnesses), the journalist, the broadcaster. Kentridge, Daumier, etc.
- DIVERSITY. Multiplicity is about diversity, not sameness. One of many, the original multiple, individual equals the whole, personal equals universal.
- ECONOMY. The multiple operates in and is the impetus for various economies – gift economy, attention economy, political economy, social economy, shadow economy.
(Gregory Sholette, [Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture](#) on interventionist art, collectivism, and the political economy of the art world.)
- GENEROSITY. The multiple alleviates preciousness and encourages generosity and exchange.
(Ted Purves, [What We Want Is Free: Generosity And Exchange In Recent Art.](#))
(Lewis Hyde, [The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property.](#))